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SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN MEDIA THEMES, April 2-9.

1. Summary: The fallout from the bloody clashes between Wafd party factions at the party headquarters on April 1 took center stage in Egyptian media coverage over the last week. While some commentators sought merely to assign blame for the violence, others took a more profound look at the Wafd crisis and what this portends for the general welfare of opposition political parties in Egypt. The Iranian nuclear issue was also subject to further parsing in the Egyptian media, as was the governments proposed new press law. End summary.

2. Wafd Clash: Coverage of the Wafd conflict, during which ousted party chairman Noman Gomaa and his supporters seized party headquarters and exchanged fire with opponents, dominated the Egyptian airwaves and print media for the week. All commentators, not least the party journal Al-Wafd (circulation: 50,000) now controlled by Gomaas detractors, roundly condemned the former party leader for resorting to violence to resolve the party power struggle. A cartoon in the pro-government Al-Akhbar daily (circulation: 350,000, April 5) depicted a former Wafd party leader lamenting to another: An unruly son like Noman always brings disgrace on his family. The editor-in-chief of the new pro-government daily Rose el-Yousef (circulation: 17,500) wrote that Gomaa had defamed democratic and political life in Egypt and violated the law (April 2).

3. A Deeper Look: There was also a great deal of media criticism, particularly in the independent and opposition press, leveled at the police forces for not intervening earlier to prevent the violent denouement. Some commentators even speculated that the state deliberately allowed the crisis to escalate in order to undermine the Wafd as an opposition party. A columnist in Nahdet Misr (independent daily, circulation: 13,500, April 2) argued that the state is systematically weakening parties for the sake of the ruling NDP and that political reform in Egypt will remain stalled unless the ruling party is reformed. A columnist for independent daily Al-Masry Al-Yom (circulation: 80,000) wrote that it was clear that Gomaa had colluded with state security, and that this security decision is part of a general plot to destroy political parties and divest political life of all content. The pro-government press kept the criticism at a more general, atmospheric level. For instance, an independent editorialist for pro-government daily Al-Gumhuriyya (circulation: 70,000) suggested revisiting the whole political party system in Egypt, allowing for a stronger role for the Central Parties Committee beyond simply licensing the formation of political parties (April 6). A conservative commentator also writing for Al-Gumhuriyya (April 5) challenged those who blamed the government for the Wafd violence and asserted that there must be a new system to educate Egyptians politically.

4. Press Law: The media focused some attention on the progress of the draft press law. While the Ministry of Justice initially said the draft law would be referred directly to Parliament for discussion and approval (April 2), the Press Syndicate expressed its concern over the secrecy shrouding the draft law and insisted on reviewing it (April 5). All papers covered Prime Minister Nazifs agreement in principle to allow the Press Syndicate to review the draft law (April 9).

5. Iran: Iran remained a hot burner issue in the Egyptian media, and while opinions differed on Irans right to nuclear technology, commentators were uniformly critical of U.S. Iran policy. A columnist for Al-Akhbar wrote that Iran has been developing its weapons for many years and there is no reason that the U.S. should try and frighten the world about that country (April 2). A liberal columnist with leading pro-government Al-Ahram newspaper (circulation: 400,000) wrote that no one in the Middle East and the Gulf would benefit from a war between the U.S. and Iran except Israel, and that in that event the Arab countries should remain neutral (April 9). Another editorial in the same paper argued that Iran has no chance of standing against the U.S., any more than Saddam had, and is wasting its resources on useless weaponry that will not improve the lot of the Iranian people (April 9). An Islamist writer in Al-Ahram bashed the U.S. for double standards regarding its concern about Iranian, as opposed to Israeli, nuclear technology (April 4).

